

Teamwork and Communication

SUBMITTED BY: WGYP Summer Instructor

SUBJECT(S): Communication, Management

GRADE LEVEL(S): 9, 10, 11, 12

≡ OVERVIEW:

In this high-energy lesson, students will be split up into different kinds of teams where they have to stay on their toes and react to unexpected situations. After a few rounds of playing, the students should have a class discussion about team dynamics, different leadership roles and how a team's communication style in a high-pressure situation may be very different from one moment to the next.

≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Management, III. Business Organization
- Communication, III. Workplace Communication
- Management, VI. Human Resource Management

≡ RELATED ARTICLES:

- [“The Art and Skill of Effective Public Speaking”](#)
- [“Tech Entrepreneur Sachin Rekhi Explains How Relationships Build Careers”](#)
- [“Teamwork with a Marshmallow on Top”](#)
- [“Storytelling Infuses Your Message with Meaning and Emotion”](#)
- [“Programming Robots in Zero Gravity”](#)
- [“Great Leaders Recognize and Value the Power of Emotions”](#)
- [“Enterprising Easter Bunnies Share Lessons in Entrepreneurship”](#)
- [“Educator Toolkit: Effective Communications”](#)

- “Educator Toolkit: Comment & Win”
- “Building a Network: ‘One Simple Connection Can Lead to So Much’”

Core Standards:

Reading Informational Text–RI.9-10.1.; RI.9-10.2.

Speaking and Listening–SL.9-10.1.

Knowledge@Wharton Article: “[Can Rabbits Teach Leadership? No? Think Again.](#)”

This article is primarily for the teacher’s reference to understand some of the games below. It should not be printed as a resource for students.

Wharton Global Youth Program Article: “[Teamwork with a Marshmallow on Top](#)”

Activity:

Introduction (5 min)

The teacher should write the word “improvisation” on the board and ask students to define this term. Once they all understand it, the teacher can explain that in meetings, no matter how much is planned, things can change last minute. It is important for the students to feel confident in uncomfortable situations.

In this class, the students will be playing different kinds of improv games and thinking about team communication during the games. After each game, the teacher should ask the students the following questions and jot down the response on the board. After all the games are played, the class should have a more comprehensive discussion about what was learned through the activity.

Questions:

- When you are playing the game (e.g. rabbit game, etc.), how important is it to pay attention to what your team members are doing? What are you paying attention to? Facial expressions? Gestures? Body movements? How is this relevant to a business meeting?

- What happens when you are not paying attention? Give examples from the games. The teacher can explain here what happens if you don't pay attention in a business meeting. Your audience may mentally "check out" and you can lose the sale or whatever the point of the meeting is.
- Does one person seem to take on a more leadership role? How can you tell from their communication style?

Completing Each Other's Sentences (10 min)

The teacher divides the students into pairs. Each pair serves, in effect, as a two-headed person. As the team bombards the pair with questions, each person in the pair replies with alternating words in the sentence. Example: If the question is, "How are you?", the answer might be, participant A: "I'm," participant B: "fine." Have each pair go through this exercise once for about a minute each.

3 minute discussion:

After students have all gone through the exercise, ask them to think about how the two-person team dynamic worked. Did they take cues from each other about what to say next? How did these cues work? Did they agree with the way the other person handled the questions or not? How did they express this?

Human Letters-Talking permitted (7 min)

Divide the group into groups of 4 to 5 people. The teachers calls out a letter. Each group has to spell out the letter on the ground with their bodies. The group can talk to each other. The group that forms the letter the fastest, or the most accurate, wins. Do this about 4 or 5 times and keep score.

5 minute discussion:

After this, ask students to think about why one team did better than the other. Was it due to better leadership, communication, team dynamics, a combination? Perhaps there were other factors. Discuss.

Human Letters-No Talking (10 min)

Divide the group into groups of 4 to 5 people. The teachers calls out a letter. Each group has to spell out the letter on the ground with their bodies. This time, the group cannot talk to each other and must decide how to do it based on gestures. The group to form the letter the fastest, or the most accurate, wins. Again, do it about four times and keep score.

Discussion (10 min)

As a group, compare what happens when you make human letters with talking versus without talking. Write some of the differences on the board.

- How did the communication styles change?
- Did some people emerge as leaders in one situation compared to the other?
- Does one person take a leadership role if it's not made explicit? More than one person? Why or why not?
- How do the other team members respond to different leadership styles? Some students may physically move others during the line up while others point to where students should go. How does this affect the group's cooperation?
- What skills proved helpful in the heat-of-the-moment situations?

Tying It All Together:

Make sure the students return to how these lessons would translate for real-life business meetings or working in an office. For example, if you are trying to give a presentation but someone in the audience seems to be losing interest or falling asleep, how do you signal to your fellow presenters that you need to change the presentation and make sure you finish with everyone involved? Brainstorm some strategies for what one could do to take charge of the situation, including using body language, taking control of the space (walking closer to the audience) and other ways (speaking more loudly or not talking for a few minutes until people start paying attention). Students should walk away from this lesson having thought about the importance of improvising in the business setting and how different communication styles emerge in these kinds of situations.